

The Wrack Line

Newsletter of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge • Newburyport, MA



United States Fish & Wildlife Service

Fall, 2017/Winter, 2018

Coming Soon: Our Fourth Annual Conservation Film Festival!

by Matt Poole, Visitor Services Manager

I can't believe it's been four years since we launched our inaugural conservation film festival at Parker River National Wildlife Refuge! Well, it's that time again. This year's festival commences on Friday evening, March 2nd and will continue through late Sunday afternoon, March 4th. As in previous years, the festival will conclude with the announcement of this year's winners of the refuge's annual **Nature and Wildlife Photography Contest**.

Early on, when people have asked me if there was some grand design to the formulation of this festival, I would respond that "yes, of course there is." Well, kinda, sorta! As the positive response to this little (85-seat capacity) festival has grown, I'm now a little more confident about offering up an honest answer. The truth is that my wife Anne and I spend about six months casually keeping an eye out for film titles that seem worth reviewing. Candidate titles are gleaned (or stolen!) from other festivals, discovered while rummaging through YouTube or Vimeo, or are suggested by other people who have an interest in sharing. What we end up with is a very interesting and diverse mix of titles.

This year's kick-off event is actually a two-parter, with one film to be screened on Friday night; the other, on Saturday night. *Sacred Cod* is a wonderfully told story about the dramatic decline in cod stocks within the Gulf of Maine and its impact on the fishing industry (with a focus on Gloucester). One of the filmmakers, who is also a Boston Globe journalist, asked if we'd like to preview another film that he'd just wrapped up. That film — *The Gladesmen: The Last of the Sawgrass Cowboys* — is about the tug-of-war between airboat operators and the National Park Service in the Everglades. Both films have very

high production values, are superbly done, and touch upon some timely environmental issues, not the least of which is climate change and sea level rise. Globe reporter David Abel will be in the house on Saturday night to introduce his new film and to answer questions about both films.

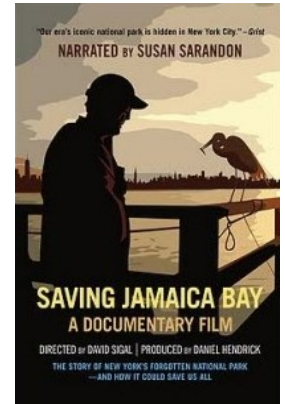
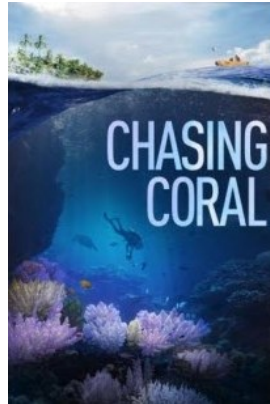
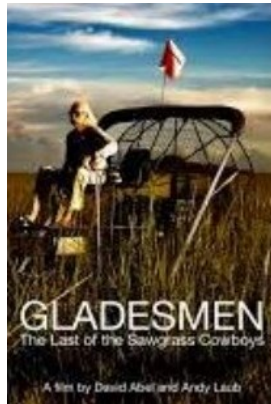
Folks, bottom line: We have a great list of films queued up for you! At this year's festival attendees will experience the films with our newly updated audiovisual system, featuring an awesome laser projector and surround sound. And, we are a very cheap date — there's no admission! Hope to see ya there!

Turn the page now for a quick rundown of our top featured films. For the complete schedule, see the [refuge website](#).

In This Issue...

| | |
|--|----|
| Our Fourth Annual Conservation Film Festival | 1 |
| The Urban Refuge Initiative: Exploring the Possibilities | 3 |
| Baby, It's Cold Outside | 5 |
| A New Fundraising Program for the Hellcat Trail | 6 |
| The American Crow: A Year-round Neighbor | 8 |
| Meet Volunteer Denise Goldberg | 9 |
| In Memoriam: Local Author Nancy Weare | 10 |
| A Wonderful Time of Year for Armchair Birding! | 12 |
| What's New at Great Bay | 13 |
| Volunteers Are Vital to the Pepperweed Project | 14 |

Featured Films for Our 2018 Conservation Film Festival!



Sacred Cod

Sacred Cod chronicles the collapse of the historic cod fishery in the waters off New England. Scientists and environmental advocates attribute the collapse to overfishing, climate change, and government mismanagement. Many fishermen, who are losing their livelihoods as the species have declined, have argued that the science is wrong and have protested government policies banning fishing for cod. Sacred Cod features interviews with fishermen and their families, along with scientists, advocates, and federal officials who warn about the risks of overfishing and climate change and say that the plight of cod could be a harbinger for fish around the world. The film tells a complex story that shows how one of the greatest fisheries on the planet has been driven to the edge of commercial extinction, while providing suggestions about how consumers can help support sustainable fisheries. [Trailer](#).

The Gladesmen: The Last of the Sawgrass Cowboys

GLADESMEN: The Last of the Sawgrass Cowboys is a feature-length documentary about the federal government's ban on Florida's iconic airboats in much of the Everglades. The measure is part of the world's largest effort to repair a damaged ecosystem, a vast river of grass that has been ravaged by more than a century of development, pollution, and other environmental degradation. The outcome will determine the future of the region's water supply, and its ability to withstand rising sea levels. It may also lead to the demise of the Gladesmen. [Trailer](#).

Chasing Coral

Coral reefs around the world are vanishing at an unprecedented rate. A team of divers, photographers and scientists set out on a journey to discover why and to reveal the underwater mystery to the world. [Trailer](#).

Walden

"On July 4, 1845, Henry David Thoreau moved to the secluded shore of Walden Pond and planted the seeds of the modern environmental movement. He wrote constantly about the interaction of nature and man—observations that today implore us to rethink our dependence on wealth and material possessions, to revisit what it means to be governed and to reevaluate our relationship with the natural world." This documentary short was created for the visitor's center at Walden Pond (in Concord, MA). [Trailer](#).

Saving Jamaica Bay

Saving Jamaica Bay tells the story of how one community fought government inaction and overcame Hurricane Sandy to clean up and restore the largest open space in New York City, which had become a dumping ground for garbage, sewage and bullet-riddled mobsters. Narrated by actress Susan Sarandon, the film includes interviews with the community activists who led the fight, and state and city officials. [Trailer](#).

The Urban Refuge Initiative: Exploring the Possibilities

by Matt Poole, Visitor Services Manager

It should come as no surprise that many national wildlife refuges are located near large population centers. That's certainly true for most of the refuges in the northeast, including Parker National Wildlife Refuge. Located at the mouth of the Merrimack River, the refuge lies at the base of a 5,000 square mile watershed with a population of 2.6 million people.

As a part of the National Wildlife Refuge System's Urban Refuge Initiative, Parker River staff members have been discussing potential opportunities for engaging urban audiences. The idea of focusing on a community located along the mighty Merrimack has great appeal because of the physical and metaphorical connections provided by the river. Often in these discussions, the City of Lawrence comes up as a great place to focus our urban partnership efforts. While nothing's yet been finalized regarding "the where" (as of this newsletter's publication), our recent attendance at a meeting in Lawrence is leading some of us to think that we might be spending more time there!

Located just 35 minutes upriver of Newburyport, Lawrence is a city with both challenges and opportunities. Socioeconomically, it hasn't experienced the renaissance that has occurred in Lowell (in large measure because of the presence there of a national park and a major University of Massachusetts campus). What Lawrence does have is a number of very dedicated organizations that are working together to support the advancement of a very diverse and deserving community. One such organization is the very same one that refuge staff met with on January 25th – GroundWork Lawrence (GWL).

GWL is affiliated with GroundWork USA, a "national network with deep local roots that helps underserved communities become healthier places to live, work, and play." There are local GroundWork organizations across the country, including at least three right here in Massachusetts (e.g., Somerville and New Bedford). One of the exciting aspects of potentially working with GWL is the fact that a number of national wildlife refuges are already working

(Continued on page 4)



The Mill District, Lawrence, MA. Note the Merrimack, Spicket and Shawsheen rivers that flow through the city.

The Urban Refuge Initiative

(Continued from page 3)

with GroundWork (including our colleagues at the Eastern Massachusetts National Wildlife Refuge Complex, which is based at the Great Meadows NWR in Sudbury).

GWL has been a positive force in Lawrence since 1999 with its programs on environmental and open space improvements, healthy food access, youth education, employment initiatives, and community events. It coordinates a wildly popular community gardening program, some of which occurs on re-claimed brownfield sites. The GWL's "Green Teams" are comprised of paid high schoolers who contribute to their community while learning vocational and leadership skills that aid their own personal growth and development. In the past, Green Team members have assisted with invasive species management work on several national wildlife refuges, including at Parker River! GWL also has a strong environmental education presence within the Lawrence public schools.

Getting back to our January 25th meeting, our goal was simply to establish an in-person connection and to discuss briefly some potential areas of collaboration; i.e., to identify how the refuge and its resources might be helpful in Lawrence. Potential activities included: assisting with environmental education programs (school year and summer); working with Green Team members (in the city and on the refuge); assisting with the interpretation of natural resources at several park areas within the city where GWL is active; conducting a "Cops & Bobbers – Hooks & Ladders" fishing event in the city; involving youth in hands-on American eel recovery efforts (in conjunction with our Fish & Wildlife Service, Division of Fisheries colleagues in Nashua, NH); and an (exciting) range of other ideas. The GWL folks also seemed quite interested in the fact that Parker River has a roster of about 100 volunteers – some or many of whom might just jump at the opportunity to work on some of these projects!

So, in closing, stay tuned for further updates about this new, grand adventure. While I won't speak for the other refuge staff, I personally get very energized about doing this type of outreach...in service to our neighbors upstream and to the National Wildlife Refuge System!



Ferrous Park, Lawrence, MA. This small urban park, situated on the Merrimack River, was created from an abandoned industrial site. The \$2.75 million park is designed for passive recreation, educational/interpretive programs, and events.

Coming Up

Conservation Film Festival

March 2–4

Volunteer Appreciation Event

March 15, 4–7 pm

Annual Earth Day Celebration

April 20 & 21

Let's Go Outside!

Saturday, June 16

Find us on Facebook!



Baby, It's Cold Outside

by Jean Adams, Outdoor Recreation Planner

It's below zero, the wind is howling and the snow is falling. If you're like me, all cozy and warm at home, you're looking out the window thinking: "Oh, those poor animals! How will they survive"? We can't imagine what it's like to be outdoors struggling for warmth, food and shelter, but, miraculously, many animals do survive. How do they do it?

Lots of us wish that we could just sleep through the winter months, and Mother Nature has granted that wish to some species of wildlife. Hibernation is essentially a deep sleep, a physical state where body temperature drops, breathing and heartbeat slow, and very little energy is used. Animals that hibernate start to build up extra fat reserves in late summer and throughout the autumn to use later on during their inactive winter months. It's a "slow burn" that keeps the animal warm, fed and oblivious to the nasty weather. When we think about hibernation, black bears immediately come to mind; however, other animals, such as chipmunks, skunks, and even some bats also hibernate.

Animals also grow thicker coats of fur to help them survive the winter months. The thick pelts of snowshoe hares, beaver and weasels keep them toasty on the frostiest of winter days. The coats of some animals, such as the hare and the weasel, will actually



Photo: Matt Poole/FWS

Some bluebirds overwinter in our area.



Photos: Nancy Landry

Why did the coyote and the fisher cross the road? Probably to look for lunch! Both photos were taken on the refuge.

turn white to help them blend in with their snowy surroundings. This home-grown camouflage allows them to spend less time hiding from passing hawks or coyotes and more time foraging for food.

Some animals will change diets during the winter. For example, a fox will feed on fruits and insects in the warmer months, but then switch to dark-colored rodents that are easy to spot in the snow.

Animals that are not typically social friends will become cuddle buddies in cold weather. Squirrels that fight at the bird feeder will become fast friends in the hollow of a tree, while bluebirds will turn a nesting box into the proverbial "clown car." All those bodies huddled together provide extra warmth that will tide the birds over on a subzero night.

Cold-blooded critters, such as frogs and turtles, will burrow under the mud or a sunken log in a frozen pond or lake. They then become dormant (a state similar to hibernation) and slow their body functions down to a near standstill. Cold water holds more oxygen than warm water, thereby allowing these animals to stay underwater all winter long while absorbing the oxygen through their skin.

Insects go into dormancy by entering a phase called diapause. They can spend the winter in a different form such as a larval stage, or they can simply die before winter and leave their progeny in the form of eggs to overwinter underneath bark or deep below the earth.

(Continued on page 14)

A New Friends of Parker River NWR Initiative: Boardwalk Plank Fundraising Program for the Hellcat Trail

by Ted Olsson, President, Friends of Parker River NWR, Inc.

The Friends is currently busy raising funds to assist in the rebuilding of the Hellcat Trail, one of the most unique trails in the entire National Wildlife Refuge System. Hellcat gives visitors the opportunity to experience up close the Great Salt Marsh, a maritime forest, a freshwater marsh and the incredible dune environments of a barrier island, while protecting these important refuge areas for wildlife.

For close to 40 years, Hellcat has been a favorite place for visitors. The Dunes Loop portion first passes through forest and freshwater swamp before ascending one of the highest dunes on the island where, on a clear day, one can view Maine, the Isles of Shoals, the Atlantic Ocean and Cape Ann to the south. On the Marsh Loop in spring and summer, one can often hear its inhabitants, such as marsh wrens, ducks, and red-wing blackbirds, while peering through the rushes for a glimpse of the members of this natural choir.

Unfortunately, the Hellcat Trail is rapidly degrading and needs major repairs, as evidenced by the closure of the Marsh Loop in October 2017 for safety reasons. The refuge has completed the design for the first phase of the project, the replacement of the Marsh Loop, and work is estimated to begin in late 2018. The project will also include upgrades to be in compliance with the Americans Disability Act whenever possible. Initial cost estimates for the project, which will be refined after the design phase is completed, are estimated to be up to \$4 million.

To help aid this effort and to provide opportunities for people to be directly involved, Friends has initiated its Boardwalk Plank Hellcat Trail Fundraiser. For a \$100 donation, people can order an engraved boardwalk plank with a name they specify. The planks are made of synthetic recycled materials and will be installed on refuge boardwalks, replacing aging wooden planks. In this way, the donors will be supporting the Hellcat Trail project while also supporting the improvement of boardwalks throughout the refuge. Corporations may order engraved planks when joining Friends as Corporate Members for a donation of \$350.

The refuge is donating the synthetic planks for this effort and will be performing the installations. All profits earned from the plank engraving will be given to the refuge specifically for this project and will be no less than 50–60% of the donation value, based on our initial production batches.

Our goal for the fundraiser is to raise \$100,000 in 2018. Friends is also pursuing private sector grants and submitted two applications in 2017. The refuge is likewise seeking government grants for this project. Everyone's objective is to revitalize the Hellcat Trail as quickly as possible, while minimizing closures and limited access to it.

We have donor orders in hand and have received the first batches of engraved planks from the engraver. Plank donations have been received for individuals, families, memorials, and as gifts for others. These will be installed as weather permits, starting with the boardwalk at Lot #1, the most visited boardwalk on the refuge. The Lot #1 boardwalk was chosen as the starting point since it allows access to the only section of refuge beach that remains open all year long. Once filled, other boardwalks will be selected. Planks will be installed approximately in the order of donations received.

Since its founding in the early 1990s, Friends has supported the refuge in many ways. Our members and supporters care deeply about the refuge and wish to protect it for future generations of humans and wildlife. The Friends organization offers people an opportunity to be directly involved in this noble mission, whether through volunteer efforts or by membership dues, donations and grants.

Want to Help?

Contact us for more information.

E-Mail: friends@parkerriver.org

On the Web: parkerriver.org





The Hellcat Trail

A Visitor Favorite for Over 40 Years!



Photo: Matt Poole/FWS



Photo: Matt Poole/FWS

About the Friends...

The **Friends of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge, Inc.** is an independent, volunteer-staffed, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting the Parker River NWR. The Friends recognize the important role the refuge plays, not only in wildlife conservation, but also in its contribution to the economic vitality of the region and in providing educational and recreational opportunities for many thousands of refuge visitors each year.

The American Crow: A Familiar Year-round Neighbor

by Matt Poole, Visitor Services Manager

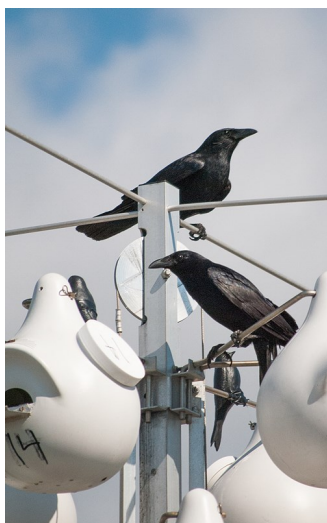
Coming up with story ideas for this newsletter is always an interesting process. Recently, some refuge staff members and I were at a meeting in downtown Lawrence, MA, when someone wondered out loud whether any of us had heard about the vast number of crows amassing each night in town. One group of birds was estimated at 10,000 individuals! I thought, "Wow, that's kind of interesting." While considering potential article topics for *The Wrack Line*, it occurred to me that it might be cool to focus on a bird species that can actually be seen here during the winter. So, that gave me all I needed to get started; I would write about the American crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*).

Crows often get a bad rap because they are particularly noisy birds. If you're not an early riser and like to sleep in a bit, the crow's early morning, silence-piercing caw will certainly get your attention! They also have a somewhat deserved reputation for being animal world bullies. I'm always amazed to see a crow actively harassing larger, predatory birds such as eagles, hawks, and owls.

Taxonomically, crows belong to the family Corvidae, along with ravens, magpies, and jays, and all species in this family are highly intelligent. There are lots of factoids out there to support this, many involving the storied raven. For example, ravens can be taught to speak! A crow has roughly the same brain-to-body ratio as a chimpanzee. See our "Fun Facts About Crows" sidebar (next page) for more tidbits.

The way the crow
Shook down on me
From a hemlock tree
Has given my heart
A change of mood
And saved some part of a day
I had rued.

— Robert Frost



Photos: Matt Poole/FWS

The American crow. At left, a pair of crows perched with blue martins at the nest boxes by parking lot #1.

The American crow is here with us year-round. It can be found in a wide variety of habitats and does very well in close proximity to humans. It's a large bird, averaging .7 – 1.4 pounds and with a wingspan that can stretch to 3.3 feet. The crow's feathers, bill, and beak are all black; its bill, thick and sturdy.

A ground feeder, the omnivorous crow will eat just about anything. Their diet may include fruit, seeds, insects, fish, shellfish, crayfish, and carrion. Given the opportunity to predate eggs or nestlings in some other bird's unprotected nest, they most certainly will. And, not unlike certain gull species, a crow's proclivity for mining the detritus of human culture for "tasty bits" is well known!

Crow life and behavior is both fascinating and complex. They typically mate for most or all of their 6–10 year lifespan. Sexual maturity is reached at age 4 or 5. The nest, constructed of twigs and sticks and lined with softer materials, is typically located at least 25 feet above the ground, often placed inconspicuously in the crotch of a tree (with a preference for evergreens). A clutch averages 3–7 eggs. Crow offspring frequently stay with their parents for a couple of years, even helping to care for subsequent generations. Some family groups number up to 15 individuals.

(Continued on page 9)

Meet Volunteer Denise Goldberg

by Jean Adams, Outdoor Recreation Planner

If you arrive at the visitor center on a Sunday afternoon, chances are that you'll be greeted by Denise Goldberg. Denise started out working as a plover warden in 2016, and later she shifted to working at the visitor center information desk when the 2–4 pm slot on Sundays opened up. Since then she has rarely missed her shift. And that is a good thing for the refuge and the visitors!

As a landscape and macro photographer, she visited the refuge quite often on days off from her job at IBM. The refuge was an ideal break from the corporate world, where software and not open spaces was her focus. Now that she's retired, Denise has more time to enjoy the refuge. Her extensive refuge day trips have given her a hands-on knowledge of what's happening and where at Parker River. This serves her well in answering the plethora of questions she gets working the front desk.

Besides her work here at Parker River, Denise also volunteers at the Stevens-Coolidge Place in North Andover, a Trustees of Reservations property where she works in the gardens. She also participates in fund raisers for WBUR, an NPR news station.

As an avid conservationist, Denise is interested in any activity that allows her the opportunity to promote the great outdoors. Always greeting visitors with a smile, she loves spreading the word about open spaces and the importance of refuges. We are certainly fortunate that she chooses to spend time volunteering with us at Parker River NWR!



Photo: Jean Adams/RWS

Volunteer Denise Goldberg at the Visitor's Center

Fun Facts About Crows

- Of all bird species, the American crow is the most vulnerable to West Nile virus.
- Hundreds of trained crows were cast in Alfred Hitchcock's 1963 film "The Birds."
- Proportionally, the brains of some crows are larger than a human's.
- Crows can learn to recognize and remember an individual human face.
- Crows sometimes make and use tools.

Examples:

- Using a cup to carry water over to a bowl of dry mash.
- Shaping a piece of wood and then sticking it into a hole in a fence post in search of food.
- Breaking off pieces of pine cone to drop on tree climbers near a nest.

The American Crow

(Continued from page 8)

Crows are very social birds, and this tendency is most noticeable during the cold winter months. In the daytime, they will often feed in large groups; however, it's at night when the numbers can really impress. Crows have been seen roosting in groups of 100,000 or more. So, curiosity and awe aside, a group of 10,000 crows in downtown Lawrence is well within the norm for this species.

One last thing: The American crow, as a species, is in very good shape and is listed as a species "of least concern" in most of the places where it's found. Again, this bird does very well in close proximity to humans. Because of this, we are afforded a special opportunity to observe and appreciate this fascinating wild creature the year round!

In Memoriam: Nancy Weare, Author of *Plum Island, The Way It Was*

by Alix McArdle & Kate Murray, Refuge Volunteers

Nancy Weare, author of *Plum Island, The Way It Was*, died at her RiverWoods home in Exeter in mid-December. Ms. Weare was born at home on Ashland Street in Newburyport in 1925 on the street where both her parents were born and brought up. She recalled many extended family members living in the immediate vicinity and she felt safe and welcomed throughout the neighborhood. When we visited her last fall, she recalled how her family would walk wheelbarrows, packed with supplies, to the boatyard at the foot of the street, loaded the family boat (a 26' cabin boat named Husky), cast off, and "turned right towards Boston" on their way to the family camp at the Knobbs, she "perched on top of the cabin singing most of the way." "Later, I was allowed to take the wheel and soon learned all the obstructions in the winding Plum Island River." She sailed from an early age (having fashioned, as a



Nancy always had a dog, usually one that she'd rescued. She once said, "I am grateful for my share of so much canine companionship, and when I have taken on a new dog, it is my way of paying tribute to the ones I have lost."

child, a sailboat from a dinghy, an oar, and a tablecloth) into her mid-seventies. On an afternoon in her freshman year at the new high school, "Mt. Rural," and wishing not to miss either the football game or the family outing at the Knobbs, after the game Nancy rowed from the Parker River launch to the Knobbs. Even after she sold her last sailboat, she would row from her Great Neck home to the clam flats of the Middle Ground to harvest supper.

The Knobbs cabin was built in 1892 for use as a hunting camp by Nancy's mother's father, A. Alfred Rodigrass. It sat on the only sandy section of shoreline on Plum Island Sound, roughly across from the site of the Life Saving Station on the ocean side. Built on stilts, of necessity, to accommodate the tides, it was knocked off its foundation three times, once gently put down on inland marsh, but totally salvageable. There were three sources of water: drinking came from the jugs brought from the mainland, dishwashing from the rain barrel heated on the black iron coal stove, and handwashing from a huge bowl positioned under the drips coming from the melting ice box. It was her great love for the camp on the Knobbs and for all of Plum Island ("my personal paradise") that lead her to write what has become the reliable history of the island up to the 1930s.

Like all young people of her time, Nancy swam, sailed, fished, clammed (teaching one of her beloved dogs that a squirting hole means he should dig), foraged for berries, and explored at will. After college

(Continued on page 11)



The Weare camp at the Knobbs

In Memoriam: Nancy Weare

(Continued from page 10)

in Boston, and twenty more years there as the art editor for a leading publishing house, Nancy returned to school to acquire a Masters degree in teaching and then spent seventeen years at Newburyport's Brown School as a special education teacher. During these years she lived on Great Neck in Ipswich, in a house from which she could see exactly where the old Rodigrass camp had been for nearly one hundred years. (The refuge razed the camp in 1989. Vacant after her mother died in 1984, Nancy and her friend Virginia would visit the camp via boat and enter through a trap door in the floor).

When Nancy decided to write her book in the early 1990s, there were almost no buildings remaining on the lower two-thirds of the island, except for The Anchorage at the Ipswich Bluffs (see Spring, 2017 edition of *The Wrack Line*), and most of the people who had once known the southern end were then in their eighties and nineties. "I was fortunate to meet and talk with many of them; a year or two later and they would have been gone." She writes, "From my house on Great Neck I watched the cottages and houses on Plum Island disappear one by one, as the owner passed away. This action inspired me to write my book . . . for I knew that in another thirty years, everyone would assume that nothing ever happened at the southern end."

Plum Island, The Way it Was became an immediate success and gained Nancy much local acclaim. She was frequently a sought-after speaker; she relished the opportunity to share her love and knowledge of the island. A second edition of the book was published in 1996 and contains an updated postscript, including a section on Camp Sea Haven and more on the problems of erosion. Nancy's love of history lead

Author Notes

1. Except for "towards Boston" in the first paragraph, all statements in quotation marks are excerpts from a memoir Nancy wrote. We're grateful to Nancy's cousin Sally Blake Lavery for making this available to us.
2. Although our acquaintance with Nancy was lamentably short, we've chosen to use her first name, knowing that by our second meeting, she would have insisted we do so. In many ways well ahead of her time as an independent and immensely capable woman, she had neither pretenses nor false pride.

to her chance discovery of Anne Bradstreet and the publication of a second book, *Anne Bradstreet, America's First Poet*, a beautiful small volume also published by the Newburyport Press. Both of her books contain extensive bibliographies, testimony to the scholarly research Nancy brought to all of her projects.

Refuge volunteers have been working to capture some of the history of the southern section of Plum Island prior to the establishment of the national wildlife refuge in 1942. As Nancy found twenty-five years ago, little is written and much must be acquired via oral history. This is even more true today. If any reader should have photographs and/or remembrances of these now long-gone days (the refuge celebrated its 75th anniversary last year), we would like very much to hear from you!



Aerial view of the Weare camp (right foreground)



A later version of the family boat that made the trip from Ashland Street in Newburyport to the Knobbs camp. The trip took an hour and twenty minutes.

Continued on page 15



Winter is a Wonderful Time of Year for Armchair Birding!

by Matt Poole, Visitor Services Manager

Needless to say, birding (and bird photography) is a big deal here at Parker River NWR. However, beyond the unpredictable and variable presence of the charismatic American bald eagle and snowy owl, winter would seem to offer slim pickings. On the other hand, if you have a bird feeder at home, you might be amazed at the diversity of bird life that can be seen this time of year. Not until I went into my storehouse of bird feeder photos did I realize how many different species we see in southern Maine during the colder months! As you'll note, our feeding station is remarkably modest, and the menu is limited to suet and black oil sunflower seed. That's it; that's all. Happily, I have finally managed to thwart the efforts of squirrels and chipmunks with the installation of a simple homemade baffle, constructed of cheap HVAC materials (available at Home Depot). Check out my photographic sampler of our backyard winter friends!

A Few Quick Photo Tips for the Backyard Bird Photographer

Photographing birds at the feeder from the comfort of a heated space is super fun and easy. The downside is that shooting through a layer or two of glass will soften your images. If you own a camera body with interchangeable lenses (e.g., DSLR), a 70–300 mm zoom lens is a great and very affordable entry point if you want to photograph wildlife, including birds at a feeder. Here are a handful of tips that will help you get better bird pictures:

- Make sure the subject's eyes are good and sharp!
- Select a fast shutter speed to freeze movement. Do this by widening the aperture and increasing ISO (light sensitivity).
- Set your lens to a wide aperture to blur distracting backgrounds.
- Use a tripod to get sharper images.
- A circular polarizer affixed to the end of your lens will help to limit reflections off the glass.
- Photograph the bird at its eye level; this makes for more natural portraits.
- Photograph behavior and movement to better tell a story.
- Provide water at your feeding station and use a heating coil to keep it from freezing.
- Avoid flash unless you really know what you're doing!

What's New at Great Bay

by Matt Poole, Visitor Services Manager

The Great Bay National Wildlife Refuge (located in Newington, NH) will soon have a new, three-bay maintenance building. Under construction now, the new shop will be situated within the former weapons storage area, near the location of the old water tower. Though the refuge is no longer staffed, Parker River personnel, along with volunteers, still do considerable work at Great Bay throughout the year, so the new facility will help support those efforts.

The construction project also includes two new RV pads, for future use by refuge volunteers. The existing, single-bay maintenance building will remain, to be used for storing refuge equipment.



Foundation work being done this past November



Construction progress as of late January



The existing, single bay maintenance building

Volunteers are Vital to the Success of the Pepperweed Project!

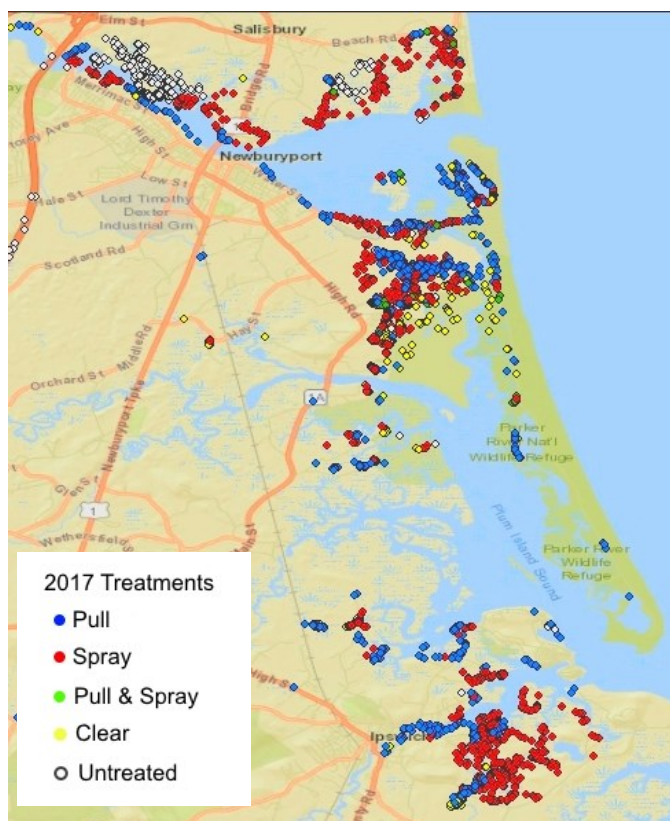
by Kaytee Hojnacki, Biological Technician

If you've been familiar with the refuge biological program over the past dozen years, then you are aware that battling the invasive plant, perennial pepperweed, has been one of our priorities. The alarm bells starting ringing in 2005, and in 2006 both the refuge staff and Mass Audubon staff (located in Wenham) started doing something about this plant. Known as a highly invasive species in coastal systems and rangelands in the western US, this invader is relatively new to the eastern US, not dominating and spreading in New England until the 1990s. For years the spread of this plant, which can produce up to six billion seeds per densely populated acre, went unchecked until biologists began springing into action.

The effort began on a small scale, with only 43 sites treated in 2006. Slowly, as funding, manpower, and urgency increased, the number of sites treated increased. A large Hurricane Sandy Resiliency grant provided some much needed funding in 2014 through 2017, allowing treatments to increase to 2,150 sites in the Great Marsh in 2017. Another 255 sites were visited because they had pepperweed in the past, but were found clear of the plant in 2017. The biggest achievement occurred in 2016, when we were able to visit and treat 99% of all known pepperweed sites in the Great Marsh. But pepperweed eradication doesn't happen overnight, as a single treatment at a site is rarely successful at completely removing the plant from that location.

Treatment is done by hand pulling, bagging, and burning the plants or through spraying with herbicide. This all needs to be done in the short window between the plants sprouting in mid-May and their going to seed in mid-July. After the plants have gone to seed, we no longer want to pull, as we risk spreading the tiny seeds as we move the bags around. Herbicide spraying is no longer effective at this time, since the plant is already naturally dying back, having fulfilled its life cycle for the year. To cover the area that the refuge is responsible for monitoring and treating, as well as the number of currently known sites, the refuge needs more eyes and hands! Over the years, volunteers have donated

[Continued on page 15](#)



A pepperweed street map showing the areas that have been treated and those that have yet to be tackled

Baby, It's Cold Outside

[\(Continued from page 5\)](#)

Of course, not every animal survives out there in the elements. Many never see spring. It is literally the survival of the fittest. It is also all about food sources and not being stressed, as well as finding the right shelter. This is why wildlife refuges are especially important in the winter. Refuges provide the habitat that wildlife need to survive a brutal winter. They provide food and shelter and limited disturbance so that wildlife can concentrate on feeding and resting and preserving their energy. In this time of high stress and dangerous conditions, please remember to keep your distance when observing Parker River's wildlife so that they may continue to rest and feed. It is quite literally a matter of life and death. After all, we are not the only living creature who wants to live to see another spring!

In Memoriam: Nancy Weare

(Continued from page 11)



A view from Nancy Weare's front yard on Great Neck over Middle Ground, the favorite clamming spot, to the Knobbs at the left. The viewing platform on the refuge's Pines Trail, looking towards the osprey nest platform, is very close to the Knobbs.



A watercolor of *The Knobbs* by Mildred Hartson (the name-sake of the second-floor gallery at the Newburyport Art Association)

The Pepperweed Project

(Continued from page 14)

an average of 1,000 hours per year towards pepperweed eradication. We would not have been able to accomplish what we have so far without their help.

With more pepperweed still present in the Great Marsh (and further abroad), our job isn't done yet. We must continue our efforts to eradicate this plant, and we will continue to enlist volunteer help. Volunteers can help in many ways. They can "Adopt-a-Site" where they become responsible for hand pulling the pepperweed at a given location (we provide the trash bags and disposal services). Or they can join the refuge hand pulling crew, which is out most weekdays from late May until early July. Even just a few hours of pulling is a tremendous help. Sites can be cleared quicker, and more sites visited in a much shorter time.

We need you!

If you'd like to help, please contact us.

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